Interview with Eleanore Cobb Lee

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Foreign Service Spouse Series

ELEANORE COBB LEE

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi and Patricia Squire

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LEE: Before you're allowed to vote in Vermont, you take the “freeman's oath,” and there's a feeling in the state that everybody is equal to everybody else. I knew nothing about the Foreign Service, and when I entered it, in the year 1941, and discovered how hierarchical it was, and the whole system extended to wives who were expected to work for their country for nothing and were placed under the bidding and supervision of “more superior” wives, I thought the whole thing was simply abhorrent.

I wasn't bothered at the first post, Toronto, which was a trading post. The chief of mission, the Consul General, interested me because he was an Edwardian snob and I had never met one, outside of literature. I thought he was vaguely amusing, and his wife was a rather gentle lady for whom I felt some compassion. And some of the senior wives were very kind to me and spared my feelings, so I didn't suffer too much.

But as I look back on it, I realize that it was a very unhappy post. At that time there was a distinction between the career and non-career services, and he made a bloody distinction between the two services. Several people drank too much at that post; one man committed suicide. It was an unhappy post and the values of the senior officer just poor, meretricious. My husband kept saying, “Oh, you mustn't judge the Foreign Service by this, just wait till we get our next post.”

We were commissioned in March 1942, so this was very early after we entered World War II. I was packing mobile libraries for the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire before we entered the war. A rather amusing incident: as I was packing away busily down at their main headquarters, I heard somebody ask, “Who is she?” I realized they were referring to me. The other woman said, “She's an American.” There was a pause, then the first lady said, “You know, you can't trust them. They invaded us once and they'll do it again.” (hearty laughter)

Well, war was declared and then there was this problem with the last class at the Foreign Service. They were frozen. Armistead was frozen in along with other members of his class and no more young men were taken in, they all had to be taken into the armed forces.

Q (FENZI): So since he was frozen into the Foreign Service, they couldn't take him into the military?

LEE: That's right. But they felt it was only fair for these young men who were frozen in to send them to about the most unpleasant posts they could think of, which I think was probably fair enough. And the post they picked for Armi was Dakar, in what was then French West Africa, now Senegal. He was to go in a convoy. By this time I was pregnant and what every young woman did during this period was to go home to mother and father, and it never occurred to any of us that they weren't wildly happy to have us. (both laugh heartily)

I went up to Vermont where my father, by now retired, was running the family farm, and Armistead went to Washington. They discussed his situation and my pregnancy and finally decided — the baby was due early in November — to give him compassionate leave of two weeks, which was very nice. So he came up to Westford, and every morning when I appeared at breakfast, three pairs of eyes looked at me accusingly. Nothing happened. His two weeks were used up and he had to go back to Newport News to the convoy. It

was rather ticklish because this particular convoy had been sunk on its last trip across the Atlantic. I still produced no baby.

Just at that time the most ferocious snowstorm that Vermont had ever had early in November came, and the Westfortown fathers had neglected to fix an important part of the snowplow; which doesn't sound like Vermont, but this [was] what happened. So the snow snowed up to the windows and over part of them, the most depressing snowstorm I've ever seen. I called my obstetrician, who said, “Well, if you can't get out, I'll phone in the instructions.” My mother said, weakly, “To whom?” (hearty laughs)

Neighbors called and said, “We'll get ox teams out, we'll do everything to get her out.” But for three days I was caught there. Fortunately the baby remained quiet. On the last day they got the snowplow fixed and I went out in a sort of cortege — there were l4 milk trucks and a great big dump truck from Si Parree [phonetic] and I was in the front seat with him, he evidently terrified that I was going to have the baby en route to Burlington. But we got there all right. Indeed I was there two days before the baby came.

At the very last minute, just as the convoy was going to shove off, Armistead called from the ship: he'd asked permission and the captain said, “I'm sitting here with my gun and if you make one false move I'll shoot you.” He had been sunk in a convoy previously and was taking no chances. So Armi called. He couldn't reach the house but of course everybody was on the same telephone line in Westford, Vermont, and somebody spoke up and said, “I think you'll find her aunt at home.” He called my aunt and explained who he was and she was able to tell him that our daughter had been born. And he went off to Africa.

I stayed in Vermont until the baby was about 11 months old. I was making plans to get to Dakar, and nobody during war times was allowed to fly out of the United States unless you were military. There were all kinds of difficulties — I couldn't even get my shots for yellow fever and all the other things you had to have for Africa. I had to go down to 90 Church

Street in New York City, so I went down and stayed with a sister-in-law who lived in New Jersey, my brother then being back in Washington in the Navy. I was nursing the baby, she was then about three months old, and then would race into the city. If there wasn't too much brass ahead of me, I would get my shots and race back in time to feed the baby.

Then I had to arrange to send out baby food. So I was in communication with baby food manufacturers. The rules forbade glass jars because they didn't want to pack glass; it was very difficult to get metal jars because of the war. Finally I was able to order l,300 cans of assorted baby food and breathed a sigh of relief and thought, “Well, we're getting things cleared away.” Armi's last words had been, “It's going to be a cinch your getting to Africa.” (they laugh heartily)

The telephone rang one day. It was the salesman I'd worked with on baby food. He said, “There's been a little glitch on the baby food. We can produce the l,300 cans but they're all spinach.” (both break down; after a while she resumes) I said, “You have to be kidding.” And we had an exchange of some rather hot words, and he said, “Well, I'll go back and see what I can do.” I finally did get the baby food and it was sent off to Africa.

When it arrived — Dakar was a very “wartime post” — the wife of the British I don't know what his status was but she was the ranking wife, saw on the bill of lading that these pur#ed things had come in and she said, “Oh goody, we'll make soups out of them.” So she began to work out of my baby food before Armistead was able to discover that the food had arrived and could stop it. We lost some cans that way.

Finally I got passage on the first ship allowed out, a neutral Portuguese ship bound for Lisbon. From Lisbon I could get a plane to Dakar. The ship was the Lorenzo Mark[phon. sp.]; they'd been about to scuttle her when the War broke out and saved her. They charged an enormous amount of money, it was dreadful, and I had arranged with them that there would be baby food on board, and canned milk, everything was just fine. And I got down to the ship and discovered they had no baby food on board and no tinned milk

whatsoever. (she laughs) So I flew to the phone. Armistead had a cousin who lived near Newport News. I explained the situation. It was SundaHe said, “I know a grocer, I'll get in and come down on the dock.” Sure enough, about four hours later sirens screamed and military police were saying, “Hey, you can't go there” and Blair Lee came down. He had baby food, he had a strainer, a can opener, milk, (laughing) he had everything. My child was the only one who didn't have dysentery and wasn't sick on this 17-day voyage across the Atlantic.

We were nighted of course and proceeded very calmly and slowly. Wahwee MacArthur, Ambassador MacArthur's wife — she was Alben Barkley's daughter, the wife of (I believe) a Third Secretary, I'm not sure — dressed somewhat like a retired spy but she was very pleasant. I was quite unprepared for her apotheosis when she became the Ambassador's wife and became so desperately unpleasant.

We just sort of sat it out. The food on board was terrible. When I got to Lisbon we were about to disembark, I was packing, little Norie, who had a tendency to put things in her mouth — you remember the round dental-floss holder? — she swallowed it before I could stop her and it caught in her throat. She started to turn blue. All I could think of was, “I've brought this baby this far and I'll have a dead child for Africa.” I tried to dislodge it, I tipped her upside down, my hand was in her throat, and then I started up the stairs to the ship's doctor. He was a little perfumed rather dark Portuguese gentleman. I roared into his office and just as I got in a flood came down the front of me and the thing came out of her throat. I said there with this screaming child and the nice little man patted me. “I'll give you something, Mrs. Lee,” he said, “the baby's all right.” I've always remembered him with great affection.

BUT I was not looking like a very chic Foreign Service wife. The mother of Lisa Green, the wife of our Ambassador to Portugal, was down at the dock to meet us, (she stops for hearty laughing) which I thought was very bad luck. Mrs. Crocker was down there. Well, we were sort of newsworthy, because we were the first boat that had come across,

I guess. I was feeling rather miserable. Suddenly a voice spoke from the dock. “Are you Eleanore Lee?” I said that I was. “Well, your husband has sent me to look after you.” This was a young man from the Embassy who had some reason to go to Dakar, and Armi said, “By the way, my wife's coming through.” Well, this paragon took me to the hotel, speaking fluent Portuguese. He had a maid who loved babies, he took me around Lisbon, and he got me on the plane for Dakar.

That was no small feat: the State Department had made an error in my papers and there was the fine little bureaucrat at the airport who said, “She can't go without this paper!” He argued and cajoled and got me on the plane.

Q (FENZI): Was he in the Foreign Service?

LEE: Well, yes and no. He was a legal type. Armi nearly died when I explained one of my conversations with the young man. He asked me what I thought of the FBI. It was dealing, I thought rather unjustly, with people who were being accused of being “unAmerican” or “Communists.” So I let fly about the FBI and explained that I didn't think they used very good judgment. Armi said, “Didn't you know that legal attach#s were invariably FBI?” (both laugh heartily) It didn't seem to make any difference, he still was very nice to me.

When I boarded the Clipper [plane] ship this nice American boy said, “Give me the baby, she got a bottle, I'll give it to her.” And when we arrived at Dakar, of course I had to go through a battery of French officials. One of them said, “Madame Lee, the port is closed with bubonic plague.” Then he looked at my passport, and sai(imitating awed tone of voice) “Ah, Madame, you have a diplomatic passport. Entrez!” So our first trip was to the Air Force Hospital. Actually one reason why we felt that I could come with the baby was because there was a very good American Air Force hospital there.

Dakar had a great deal of misery, I saw elephantiasis and leprosy and just terrible illness and wretchedness there. But there were several doctors at the American hospital who

wanted to be baby doctors and hadn't seen babies for a long time, so we got very good attention.

We settled into a little house across from the Consulate General. It was rather better furnished than most houses in Dakar then. Our predecessor had won two chairs in poker game on a ship, leather chairs still with the bolts on that bolted them down. And Armi had made a sofa out of a car seat with a Mauretanian blanket. So we were rather spiffy. We had a dining room table and I think five or six chairs that matched it; I don't recall where they came from.

I remember the first party we gave, the whole doorway, screen and all, fell over the entering guests' head. The termites had eaten it. When it rained, we had to wear rubbers to get from the front of the house into the sleeping quarters because the roof had never been fixed. Now and then I read things from home about cookie-pushers in the Foreign Service having this life of terrible eas(laughing) while the rest of the world was wracked with pain.

Q (FENZI): Was this as amusing at the time as it is now?

LEE: Well, I didn't mind this very much. I can remember pushing Norie early in the morning in a pram and thinking, “What am I doing here, in the heart of Africa?”

Q (FENZI): You talked about the drums, too.

LEE: Yes. In the Medina you'd hear the drums. It was a little bit menacing. There was a marvelous beach at Yaw.... where occasionally we could go. They had an enormous black swimmer there, he must have been six feet six, whom the Army hired to watch — the surf was terrific and if you got too far out he would race out and get you. It was a beautiful place.

Our Consul General, who is now dead, was a really dreadful man. This was my second experiencwith [an Edwardian snob]! (finishing the sentence with a laugh) He hated the tropics, they really made him feel quite unreal. He drank a great deal. He disliked blacks intensely, he didn't like the French much; and there he was.

Q (FENZI): Sounds like an ideal choice for Dakar.

LEE: So Dakar was a great post for him. He was intemperate and choleric. When I was offered a chance to teach in a lyc#e, they'd been without one for a long time. And I didn't dream of asking for money, I'd learned that you mustn't have any money for what you did in the Foreign Service. It was a volunteer position. Mr. Wilkinson called me over and said, “I can't keep you from taking this job but I'll break your husband if you take it.”

Q (FENZI): This was a volunteer job, teaching English in a French school.

LEE: That's right.

Q (FENZI): Why did he feel so strongly?

LEE: Well, I don't think he liked women. He had been married. Halways referred to his wife as “that wretched woman “. He had had a mistress in Germany, been utterly happy in Germany, the Germans knew how to run things properly. I think that he just felt he wasn't going to allow anything he didn't want; he was boss. Five people at that post paid their way to get home and out from under him. He was really a pretty dreadful man. There was an awfully nice young naval officer who was an alcoholic who was trying to stay off alcohol, and he tempted him. It made him feel superior to see Dick get drunk. He just was the sort of man who should not have been in the Foreign Service.

The thing that appalled me was that when the inspectors came out — a very nice inspector came out when I was there, he knew that this was a bad person who shouldn't be in the job — nothing was done about it.

Q (FENZI): The old-boy network.

LEE: It was the old-boy network, and it just seemed to me that people were allowed to be unpleasant and uncivil and incompetent. When we had official parties — the mayor of Dakar was a coal-black Senegalese who was a graduate of the Sorbonne, one of the men on the supreme bench whatever they called it was another black — they were never invited. You can imagine what damage this did to us. So, that was my “second experience.”

Then we were moved to Australia. The first problem with the State Department was, they didn't see why I shouldn't precede Armi and go with a small child to Australia on my own and find a house while he went back and be a consultant at the Department. The Departmen(she laughs) would save a little money. We finally argued them out of that ...

Q (FENZI): This was right after the war?

LEE: Yes. So we took a ship which had been a transport ship of some kind. Marshall and Lisa Greewere on that ship. From the United States, we were going to Australia and they were going to New Zealand. You see, I'd finally said I just wouldn't go to Australia, couldn't possibly; and Armistead raised enough of a shriek so they finally relented. We berthed the ship at New Zealand first en route to Australia and the New Zealand war brides came on in droves. Some of them had babies, they'd been separated from their men who'd gone back to the States to be demobbed, and their parents were there on the dock, weeping, and the girls were crying and the babies were yelling. It was quite a scene. These poor girls finally got on the ship and we got under way. Wishing to be terribly nice to these young women, they ordered up tea for all these young girls. The tea came: lukewarm water and teabags. They burst into tears again! (hearty laughter) I've always remembered that.

So we dropped them off at New Zealand and went on to Australia. We had to go to a hotel, which happened to be a very good one, in downtown Melbourne. We could stay

there only three days. It seems to me MacArthur was coming through with an entourage, preempting all the hotel space. After a three-day search we found this obscure place way out in the boondocks. They said they didn't have a crib for the baby, so three of us slept in one bed. It's miraculous how much space a small child takes in a bed — she had all the bed. I remember it was freezing cold. I finally found a little room with a little fire, and two crones bending over it rubbing their arthritic hands, and one of them saying, “I wouldn't have central heating. It's weakening.” (heavy laughter)

Finally we found a house, we rented one near Heidelberg, a lovely part outside Melbourne, on Brooke Street, with the most marvelous neighbors whom we stayed in touch with all the rest of their lives; most of them are no longer living. A wonderful woman lived across the street who had three children. At that time I had only the one, and I felt that she taught me so much about being a parent. Then a neighbor whom I'd not met called up out of the blue, I thought this was so very Australian, introducing herself on the telephone. She said, “I'd like to give a tea for you” and told me how to reach her house, in walking distance. As I walked up the driveway my heart sank: I smelled coffee, and thought, “I'm afraid she's having coffee for me.” Sure enough, in the dining room there was tea at one end and coffee at the other. “Which will you have, Mrs. Lee?” she asked. Aware that I was a diplomat's wife, I said, “Oh, the coffee. Thank you so much.” It was the most nauseous brew I've ever tasted in my life, and she said, “Will you have another cup?” And doing my best for my country, I said, (breaking up between phrases) “Yes, it's delicious,” and she said, “I do think it's the mustard.” (both break up completely)

She was a marvelous young woman, and she had an en tout cas tennis court and I played tennis there. I discovered these Australian women were born with tennis racquets in their hands and I just had a marvelous time. I remember Australia with so much love and affection. I've often said if I couldn't live in my own country, I'd go back to Australia.

As for the officer in charge, the third one in my life: well, he was civil, really very civil, and his wife was very nice. But I ran into trouble at the very beginning because I was the only

career wife there. Before I came, the non-career wives — this is something people today wouldn't know anything about — got together. These wives hadn't met me, hadn't heard anything about me, and decided that I would be absolutely impossible. By looking up the book, they found some obscure rule that they could have the chauffeur drop all their cards at the hotel and wouldn't, any of them, follow up. So nobody called on me, and I was alone with a child at this post and nobody called.

Q (FENZI): And there must have been only a few people.

LEE: It wasn't a big post. There were about five of them, and they got together and made decisions. (laughing) When we got into our house, I made personal calls on all these wretched women. They never really liked me. When the new people came in and I met them at train, boat or plane, it was different then. But really our happiness in Australia was because of the Australians.

The Chief of Mission was not really interested in ideas or diplomacy. He was interested in the Foreign Service, and his wife was interested in the protocol. She was really a very sweet woman but I irritateher. I lost a baby because of a miscarriage in Australia. I managed to get pregnant again but the doctor said, “You'd better not stand a lot of time.” So when the Fourth of July thing came along, she wanted Armi and me to stand. I said Armi would love to but the doctor said I'd better not do it. She said, “My dear, it's your country.” I, unfortunately, laughed, it was so absurd, and it hurt her feelings; I was sorry about that.

So that was our third chief officer. I hadn't met anybody, at that point, that I thought was intellectually very stimulating or impressive. And I thought, “What goes in the Foreign Service?” I'd been in, now, about six years. I'd met some junior officers that I thought were really terrific, but I hadn't met anybody “up there.” (she laughs)

Then we went to New Zealand. I was expecting a baby any minute and the doctor had advised the State Department that I should not be moved because of my past history. The

State Department said, “It won't hurt her a bit” and moved me. So I had a new doctor and a new hospital and they were righ(she laughs) — nothing happened. But who was at the plane to meet us? John Stewart Service. Who made our bed and arranged the food in the cupboards in the place we stayed until we got a house? Caroline Service. He was DCM, there being no Ambassador at the moment. So that was my introduction to the Services. Over the years as I look back over all of the people I've known in the Foreign Service, Jack Service was the most intelligent, the most capable, the most wonderful Foreign Service Officer that I ever met. And of course he was crucified by the Service?

Q (FENZI): Crucified by the Service?

LEE: Well, he had a lot of loyal friends but I was thinking of Dulles who came in at the end and used his position to do his best to destroy Jack. No: you're right to correct me, because Jack had many loyal friends but unfortunately they weren't in the highest offices. I don't remember how long the Services were in New Zealand. I think he was transferred to India and she went there with the children, as I recall. Then he was recalled back to Washington to face the charges. That was a very sad period, and you've talked about it with Caroline.

Pretty soon our Ambassador came, Ambassador Scotten. He was not a mental giant. She was fascinating, very chic, with a sort of French glamor, who had evidently grown up with a lot of money and had hardly drawn her own bath water. She came to New Zealand and it was quite a shock. But it was interesting to see — she was a very intelligent woman, more so I thought than her husband — and she had a nervous tic and had been having illnesses. Suddenly she called me one day, saying, “I've been asked to give a talk on the League of Women Voters. Can you tell me something about them?” So I told her about the League. Then she was asked to be in a play. She'd never done any of these things and she had a whale of a good time. Her health got better. And she had a very tender heart, she was a very nice person.

That was a very happy post. It was a small Embassy and fortunately everybody liked everybody else. We kept in touch with one another over the years and it worked out very well.

Q (FENZI): You mentioned curtseying.

LEE:(laughing) Oh yes. The representative of the Crown came and a big reception was held at Government House for Governor-General Freiburg, who had been a very fine head of the Anzac forces during the War. He represented the Labor Party, I think. New Zealand is incredibly democratic, wonderfully so. Unfortunately, our Ambassador decided that we should all curtsey. Having grown up in Vermont, and having taken the Freeman's Oath, I said, “I just think this is a very bad idea. We're not servants of the Crown. Curtseying is an act of abasement and we shouldn't do it.” But I was overruled. I gather that a ruling has now been handed down that Americans never do curtsey to Royalty. So I was right! But anyway, I gave a very unstandard curtsey. Howard Elving, the very nice Counselor of Embassy, said, “That wasn't much of a curtsey, Eleanore.” (she laughs) “Well, it's the best I can do,” I said.

I remember a Canadian saying to me, “If you're not going to curtsey, I'm not going to either.” So at the end of the line, I didn't curtsey, and she didn't. I had said to my husband, “I just don't want to curtsey, I don't feel I should,” and Armi would get this plaintive look and say, “Well, of course there's my career.” (both laughing) But we had this understanding if something really important came up, he would not insist in humiliating me. When we were at Brussels and the wife of the DCM and some other wives were really humiliated by the Ambassador's wife — you know I just felt that these husbands ...

Q (FENZI): You were there with Mrs. MacArthur?

LEE: Yes. And she was a Medea. I think she was a desperately unhappy woman, that's the only way I can figure it.

Q (SQUIRE): And she followed a perfectly lovely lady, Mrs. Burden, who was a Vanderbilt, a lady.

LEE: They would invite you to some function which you ought to go to anyway and you'd go and she'd thank you, and then she'd walk you out to the car afterwards. I remember Thanksgiving, when they invited [everyone] to a Thankgsviging dinner and the DCM went to her and said, “You know, most of them probably want to be home with their children then, Mrs. Burden.” He was really belling the cat, because he was fond of her. And she said, “Oh, I never thought of that, of course they don't have to come if they don't want to.” She was just so anxious always, so sweet and nice. And then to have this crew come sweeping in. He kept talking about “the taut ship,” he was going to run by God a t-a-u-t ship. And everybody just hated his guts.

Q (SQUIRE): So he was that way too and didn't see anything amiss with her behavior.

LEE: Evidently not. I don't know what they did in the quiet of their bedroom, I'm sure. I expect they must have had some words, but they were both unpleasant people.

Q (SQUIRE): He called everybody “girl,” which nearly drove the head of the Political section, this marvelous lady named Margaret Tibbetts, up the wall to be called “hello girl.”

Q (FENZI): Oh yes: she was one of the very early women in the Foreign Service.

LEE: And she was marvelous, really a wonderful mind. You haven't taped her, have you? (Fenzi says no) I have a nice story about her. She came home and President Johnson appointed her Ambassador to Norway. It was in the wintertime, she came from Maine, her deceased father was a doctor and her widowed mother lived in Maine. She called up one very snowy day when New England was engulfed in storm, and said, “Mother, I've got great news to tell you.” And her mother said, “Margaret Rose, that's lovely but I've got wonderful news to tell you.” Margaret said, “The President has just made me Ambassador to Norway.” And her mother said, (she imitates cozy tone of voice) “Well Margaret that's

fine but do you know we've got 42 inches of snow?" Tibbetts was supposedly going to Finland first, but the Finns turned her down because a lot of business is done in the sauna. I think Norway was a more pleasant experience.

I think I'll go back to Jamaica. We had a home assignment. This was where I began to hear more and more about McCarthy. I can remember taking Rebecca, our pre-school child, [to] Phoebe Hearst's school, we lived in DC at 35th Street, and talking with some indignation about what McCarthy was doing. A Foreign Service wife was there and said, "You mustn't say these things out loud." This horrified me further, becaused it seemed to me it was a time when Americans should say a good many things out loud, and the louder the better it would be. But we began to be aware how dangerous the climate was in the United States.

We had indeed while still in New Zealand begun to be aware, because some very unpleasant things had happened. An authority in New Zealand on some subject, I've forgotten what, had been asked for by an American institution which needed his expertise. The FBI or the CIA or somebody had discovered that this expert's father had belonged to the New Zealand Communist party. The expert himself had never been a Communist, had no sympathy for it though he was friendly with his father — you know how it is in New Zealand and Australia. This man was debarred from the United States even though it was in our interest for him to come. It was just one of those silly things that went on during this tense time.

Then we ran into a rather heartbreaking situation. Armistead's brother, Duncan Lee, had been with the OSS, later the CIA, and his wife, whom he'd met at Oxford, were accused by Elizabeth Bentley of being secret members of the Communist Party. We opened the New York Times one morning and there was Duncan's picture on the front page. Duncan never took the Fifth Amendment and denied that he was a member a Party member. Knowing Duncan that it was absolutely inconceivable that he was.

Then the State Department bored in on Armistead. “What can you tell us about your brother, what can you say about your brother?” Armistead's reply was, “I have nothing to say about my brother except I know about his loyalty in the Service.” That was put in his record as being rather sinister. Duncan always felt that Armistead suffered in some of these years.

Q (FENZI): You said that State Department bored in, it must have been because McCarthy was putting pressure on — who was Secretary of State then?

LEE: Dulles came in later. But you see, there was a security group in the Department whose duty it was to root out subversives, and these people were almost mindless. They began to count numbers — you could find so-many people, it accrued to your benefit and to your record and it pleased some of the more dreadful Senators we had to see these names come out. It was a very sad time. And then there were people who were trying to prove their patriotism in the State Department, and they would write reports and it was whether so-and-so was “possibly subversive.”

Q (FENZI): You really couldn't trust your colleagues, people who had been friends.

LEE: And Armi had been to Oxford too, he was a Rhodes Scholar, and there were questions about — actually, the Chicago Tribune ran a frontpage story about Rhodes scholars, saying probably their loyalty wasn't to the United States at all anyway, it was probably to England. Which is absurd.Q (FENZI): Do you have a copy of that?

LEE: Probably somewhere. But it was a terrible blow to Armi's parents. His father was an Episcopal minister and his mother was a rather extraordinary woman and they were ... [End of side A, tape l; Begin side B, tape l]...[because of some doubt where preceding side of tape had ended, they repeat anecdote about Tibbetts, and Lee's initial remarks about her brother-in-law and accusation by Bentley]

... actually was in OSS, he flew the Hum[China-Burma-India theater of WWII]. He'd also been a Rhodes Scholar and at Oxford, met and married Ishbel and returned to the States. He was in the plane that went down with Eric Sevareid, did you remember that? They had to bail out; and Duncan had never been in a parachute before — I'm sure I would have put my arms around the engine and gone down with the plane. They landed and one man was killed. They were in headhunting territory, in jungle. One of then was leading them out and they met a headhunter. He didn't know quite how one addressed a headhunter, all he knew was what he'd read in James Fenimore Cooper. So he raised his right hand and said, “How!”

Q (FENZI): Where did this plane go down?

LEE: I really don't know — New Guinea? It was sort of Malaysia, and they found a archetypical romantic British officer living with his bathtub and tent and a dressing-for-dinner person who knew all about the area, who finally helped them and they got out. This was very exciting. But anyway, Duncan was accused by Elizabeth Bentley whom they'd met socially in Washington of being a member of the Communist Party and this is what hit the front page of the New York Times. I was told by a newspaperman that actually the FBI it would be — he was OSS and a member of the CIA, and the FBI was evidently looking into this sort of thing, and they felt even more upset over Ishbel, I suppose thinking she was an alien, and everybody “knew” that British intellectuals were all risky people.

Q (FENZI): So she couldn't come into this country.

LEE: Well, she was here. Something else happened. You can never clear yourself when you've been accused. Duncan didn't take the Fifth, and he testified, and he told how he knew Elizabeth Bentley. Actually the things that she said Duncan had told her he couldn't possibly have told her because they were outside his perimeter somehow. Anyway, he had these black marks against him. And then Armistead was approached by the security section of the State Department asking him about his own career and his own beliefs,

and what could he tell about his brother — to testify against his brother. This really riled Armistead very much, and he responded in a haughty manner. When we finally got Armi's file from the FBI, it's full of black marks.

And there's one charge in it that he went down to Chatham Hall, a girls' school in Virginia where his father had been headmaster, and he'd come back from the Soviet Union and had a hammer and sickle in his buttonhole and gave this marvelously glorified picture of the Soviet Union and how wonderful it was. And that was in his file. Armistead has never been to the Soviet Union in his life, never gave a talk down at Chatham Hall. It's just absolutely made up of whole cloth. But I'm sure this happened to a lot of other people too.

Q (FENZI): You alluded to the security people beginning to think in numbers. (a cautionary repetition of last part of Side A)

LEE: Yes. They wanted to show how efficient they were, so they began lookling into all sorts of things and trying to rack up kills. There were people in the Foreign Service who were not craven, who stood out against this but you can understand how in a place like Germany, for instance, under the Nazis why so many people folded, and why so many people folded in Romania. When you're going to be persecuted or people you love are going to be persecuted, how many of us are courageous? But Duncan's trials were ended there. He was an international lawyer, he could argue before the Privy Council in England. He was transferred to Bermuda where the Star Insurance Company had a big outfilt and he and Ishbel — they had five children — were in Bermuda. President Eisenhower was going to go to Bermuda for some sort of conference and the security people and FBI said, “Oh my goodness Duncan Lee is there, a known Communist spy, how dangerous.” And they brought him home and left Ishbel there with five children and he couldn't rejoin her for a whole year. There was nothing he could do about it.

Q (FENZI): It's hard to believe.

LEE: There wasn't anything he could do. They were divorced. We think that after 21 years and five children but this experience was the final push.

Q (FENZI): And this all reflected against your husband, didn't it.

LEE: Well, in a way yes. Duncan was so upset over Armistead and we kept saying, “Look, the feeling around the country, the whole ambiance is so bad, it didn't take you to do anything.” Armi spoke out, I spoke out. Look what was done to Jack Service, it all went on his record. For a certain kind of mind this was a bad thing.

Q (FENZI): And Edmund Clubb and John Paton Davies — why were those three perhaps the ones who suffered the most?

LEE: They were the ones who “lost China.”

Q (FENZI): Yes, but there were other people who “lost China” too.

LEE: But John Stewart Service and John Paton Davies and Clubb and I think there was someone else... They seemed to have it in for the China hands. You know, we were almost sent to China. Armi was born there. Armi has often said, “Why, I could have lost China.” (both laugh) “I came within an ace of losing China.” (hearty laughter) I can hear him.

Q (FENZI): On to Jamaica, you said you were exiled to Jamaica.

LEE: We went to Harvard for a year, which was very pleasant, and then we went to Reykjavik —Q (FENZI): And you met Adrian Cook at Harvard.

LEE: We asked for a European post and they said they'd love to give us a European post and it turned out to be Iceland. We had to send Norie away to school because there was no way of giving her high school iReykjavik. There was an American school some place in England but I had looked it over andidn't think it was very good, they had dreadful

control over the children, just bad. So we sent Norie to Chatham Hall, where else. Then I started the school and taught third and fourth grade, but the shining light in Reykjavik was the DCM and his wife, Theodore, who is now dead, and his wife Louise who, now in her 80s, lives across the river, I see her frequently. He had been a newspaperman, and he was a rock of integrity. Nobody got away with anything with Ted, and he never once buckled under McCarthyism or anything. A wonderful person. He was the one who when he became editor of the Foreign Service Journal, kept asking me to write some things about the Foreign Service. That's how I wrote “The Five.” He kept saying, “Why don't you write them? You've got things to say about the dreadful system the Foreign Service. Why don't you do it? I won't let anybody know it's you.”

Q (FENZI): But you did do them under a nom de plume.

LEE: Yes, I had to, because Armistead was still in the Service and poor Armi couldn't take anything more. He already had a file that reached to the skies, I suppose, and I knew that Ted would never reveal who I was, if they tortured him he wouldn't reveal it. He really was a wonderful man.

We had a good time in Reykjavik. I had thought it was sort of a dreary assignment, but you know when you go some places, begin to meet the people, understand the history ...

Q (FENZI): But you don't go with any expectations, my husband always sai(she laughs) ...

LEE: You do better!

Q (FENZI): Yes! You talked about having parties and people staying all night.

LEE: And there was an enormous amount of drinking. Now, the Icelanders drink in spurts. If the liquor is there, they'll drink it all up. If it's not there, they don't mind. And I gather this is apt to be true of the Finns and the Danes and the Swedes. So you got so you didn't bring out the bottl(laughing heartily) when people came. But I had enormous admiration

for them, living on that windswept, treeless island. I remember going to see their national forest and the trees were this high and a sign said “Please do not step on the trees.” They were trying to reforest, and it's evidently very difficult once you've removed all the trees.

While we were there several ships went down. In the North Sea the rigging gets covered with ice and then the whole thing careens over. There was one very interesting man named Benjamin Franklin — now his last name escapes me — Stefansson or something like that. He was an economist, and the first time we had him for dinner I asked him, “How did you happen to be named Benjamin Franklin Whatever-it-was?” And he said, “My brother was named Benjamin Franklin. He was on a fishing ship — of course in those days everybody made their living fishing — and the ship went down and all hands were lost. My mother was pregnant with me. Benjamin came to her in a dream and said he was coming back, and when I was born she knew that it was Benjamin. So I became Benjamin Franklin.” Evidently there is a very strong strain, sort of like table-rappings. And if you're ever out in this lunar landscape in Iceland when the wind is moaning across the rocky fields, you can see the ghosts.

We saw quite a few interesting paintings when we were there. They were abstract paintings, and I've never liked abstract paintings until I lived in Iceland. It's an “abstract” landscape and I could see what they meant.

They're very literate, they had more bookshops per capita than any other country in the world. They all spoke English — fortunately, because Iceland is a highly inflected language. Armistead studied it so he could read the economic news in the newspaper but I gather that it's just a terrible [language] — nothing like ignorance: in college I had had Anglo-Saxon and Old English and I thought, Oh, it'll be absolutely nothing to me when I go to Iceland. Well, of course the Icelandic language is preserved in amber, it went way, way back long before Anglo-Saxon or anything I'd ever studied. Our children, to our amazement, picked it up. Jeffrey came home one day and said, “You know, there's a British ship out in the harbor and it's fired on an Icelandic boat.” I said, “Oh Jeffy, that

can't possibly be true.” He said, “Yes, it's true.” I said, “How do you know?” He said, “Well, this Icelandic boy told me.” I said, “Jeffrey, you don't speak Icelandic.” And he said, “No, I don't.” (she laughs) But he did. That's when we learned he had begun to pick it up. Isn't it amazing how children have a special center in their brain that seems to make it possible, that locks it in.

Q (FENZI): Well, they have fewer inhibitions than we do. And they have fewer words to learn.

LEE: That's right, it's a play vocabulary, and it is easier. But then of course it goes very quickly. When we went to Brussels it was gone before you could say “Jack Robinson.”

Q (FENZI): Once they started to school and began to read, then I think the— at least my children kept French.

LEE: Yes but you see, you don't read Icelandic. When we were there, only about 180,000 people in the whole world spoke the language. It's a lovely language to listen to. If you walk into a room hearing Icelanders talk, there's a — you think it's English. Was it Archibald MacLeish spoke about “the iron of English rings from the tongue.” You get that same feeling when you hear the Icelanders talk. And it is our great-great-grandfather language. They were marvelous, rugged, strong and very democratic people. I did admire them.

Q (FENZI): You've given us a wonderful backdrop against which you played out your Service years; we know exactly where you were. But what were you doing in this time? Were you teaching school and taking care of children and giving teaparties? How did you spend your time?

LEE: Well, going back to Australia and New Zealand: we were living in a neighborhood in Australia. First, in Africa, I taught some businessmen, as I put down on the bio-data form. They wanted practice in English conversation. And I gave dinner parties. There

was a terrible protocol question in Dakar because practically all of the young women we knew were “living” as they quaintly put it “in sin”. I was asked by a ver(she breaks up momentarily) stiff lady at the American Consulate why I entertained young women who were openly living in sin. She herself was living in sin, but discreetly, and she thought that a distinction should be made between those who were doing it — of course, everybody knew Dakar was like something out of “The Alexandria Quartet.” [Durrell tetralogy] Everybody knew what everybody else was doing.

So I said, “Well, I'll think about it.” I was the only Foreign Service wife on the coast of Africa. (both laugh heartily) So I thought about it deeply, and then I handed down my decision. I said, “I don't feel I should make any distinctions.” So we invited all. I felt for the young secretaries — more of them began to arrive as we got farther away from the War. And our lovely Consul General said, “I don't want anybody going down to the dock to meet these wretched women, they've got to learn what it's like here.” So Armi always sneaked off with somebody else and met them, the poor souls that came in. And then I got so I invited them to my house, and then I explained about sex in Daka(laughing gain) and about how very easy it was to shack up with a nice young man, and how a lot of them were married, and a lot of it was heartbreak, and I hoped very much they would think carefully about what they did and their future there. I must say I didn't have a great deal of authorit(both laughing) but I felt I'd made an effort.

It was a rotten kind of decadent city. It was full of soldiers, full of gossip; it was an extraordinary experience. I remember going to the beach with Norie one time and a woman coming over and saying, “Oh! I heard you'd gone to South Africa with Major Somebody-or-Other.” I said, (she assumes a sprightly tone) “Oh! That's interesting. I hadn't been able to find anybody to leave the baby with, whom would you suggest?” You know, it was just full of rumors. And then there was one poor woman, wife of a French official, who came and begged to be invited to the parties at the Consulate. This little kind

of rat-trap consulate with people barely able to get along with each other, and she felt this was the epitome of society and begged to come. It was sort of horrifying.

Q (FENZI): But it was nice that we had tha[phrase obscured by cough].

LEE: Well, let's see, what did I do in Australia ... In Australia we were part of a neighborhood and there were just constant meetings. We lived in the Australian community and sort of merged to do official functions. I did have a miscarriage there, and started to have a second baby. It was very informal. I did give quite a few talks. People would ask me to talk before schools. (tape turned off during coughing spell, then resumes)

But there was so much emphasis on food, and on clothes, and on social position. I remember an incident in Brussels when Judy, very pregnant, came to the DCM's coffee, I brought her, and she told me she was feeling a little bit wispy and would go out and sit in the car. I was approached by the wife of the Agricultural Attach#, who said, “I want to get to the trolley, would you take me there?” I said I'd be delighted. So we walked out together. Arrived at my car, there was little Judy sitting in the front seat, and this woman stood there. I went around to the driver's seat, she was still standing there. It didn't dawn on me what the matter was, and finally she said, “Well, I suppose don't worry about the order of your going.” And it dawned on me: she thought she shoud be in the front seat. So I said, “No, just get in the back seat and go.” And I took her down.

Q (FENZI): There were people who did that. Like going to the ladies' room. I remember being sent in ahead because I was pregnant, otherwise you went in according to the rank of your husband.

LEE: I do have one funny passage in belling the cat where I tell about Wahwee at a party sitting down in the center of the sofa that will hold five and the ladies peeling off according to their rank.

In Australia I enjoyed myself very much. I did give some talks. Once somebody asked me one time to give a talk on “America the Melting Pot,” so I graciously consented. Armistead reported it to the Consul General, who said, “I don't think that's a very good subject, she might get into difficulties with that. I don't want her to talk on America.” So I had to tell these people that I couldn't talk on America the melting pot. “Well,” they said, “what could you talk on?” And I said, “How about Robert Frost?” So I talked about Robert Frost the New England poet.

Q (FENZI): I know that in Brussels you graded the exams of the English-speaking children at the Common Market school?

LEE: No. I tutored American kids who were going to take the SATs. There was one fellow, living as nephew with his aunt and uncle, who was going to take the SATs and had hardly ever written a composition in his life. So he came to me, and I said, “Let's pretend that this is the subject: How has the hero in literature changed? Try not to think in more than three paragraphs, and do this and this and this.... “ This is the subject he got on his exam: “The Hero in English Literature.” (she breaks up) And I got a book, he gave me Bartlett's Quotations with a little inscription on it. He got into the college on my psyching.

What else? I served on the school board with Hope, and we were really rather embattled on that school board, we spent a lot of time on it. Then I belonged to the Canadian Women's Club, where you had to produce a scholarly paper. So I produced a scholarly paper. There was a lot of entertaining. And I can remember it was pretty tense because so often somebody didn't come in on time on a plane. And I remember the first dinner party I gave. Of course Angela was there, and I had a caterer. One of the Belgian guests came in, and when he sat down at table he tucked his napkin right into his cravat, and you realized he lived for his food. So I just watched breathlessly. When the grand marnier souffl# came in, he burst into applause, (she claps her hands) he congratulated the cook and Angela, and they tipped everybody. Which seemed to me a very strange thing to do; and I realized

that food meant a very great deal to Belgians. I was very careful. I didn't have a caterer after that, I did it myself, but Angela was a great help, she really was an angel.

Q (SQUIRE): And remember when you used to come with your washing when your machine broke down?

Q (FENZI): And lowered the tone of your building.

LEE: We had a very nice couple named Jul#, [phonetic] who lived just above us. Our conversation was confined to “Bonjours! Bon soir!” One day, after we'd been told we were leaving, Mme. Jul# said to us, “Mme. Lee, I understand you're leaving us.” And I said, “Yes, alas, we are.” And she said, “Oh, what a shame, you are so simpath#que!” That was warmth from a Belgian.

Then we were asked by the Pouterman[phonetic], who went to Brittany for a holiday, I think they had a little house there. And we, to our surprise, got a postcard from them asking why didn't we come and they could put up some of the children and there was a nearby hotel. Armi showed this at the Embassy, and everybody said “GO!” So the Poutermans took Rebecca and Norie, and we had Jeffrey in the hotel, and we had a lovely time. The Poutermans were warm, and when we left Mme. Pouterman said, “Your girls, zay could stay wiz me forever.” [they could stay with me forever]

Q (SQUIRE): They were Flemish, which made a difference.

LEE: Yes, it did. He did translations into Flemish of Robert Frost's poetry. He said it translated very easily into Flemish. I never saw his translations, it wouldn't have meant anything to me if I had.

That's pretty much what I did. I had to be home with the children quite a lot. And it rained a great deal. We had a Monopoly game going in the living room ...

Q (SQUIRE): With my child, whenever it was raining.

LEE: It was back and forth. We were very sedulous about that. So I think we were pretty well occupied.

Q (SQUIRE): French lessons.

LEE: Oh yes, I went to the Embassy every morning and got oiled up in French. In New Zealand, I did give some lectures for the Workers Educational Association, which was wonderful, a very active outfit. They asked me if I'd be willing to give lectures on American poets. So I gave it twice. I think there was a series of six lectures that I wrote and gave. Then I was asked by some little town outside Wellington to repeat it and gave it a second time. Then the radio station called and asked me — Edgar Allan Poe's birthday was coming up, and would I talk a little bit about Poe, and would I read 'Bells'?" I said I'd be delighted to talk about Poe but I really couldn't read "Bells." I couldn't see myself saying "Bells, bells, bells..." So I asked them if "The Raven" wouldn't do just as well? They decided it would.

Then I did an Emily Dickinson lecture. She has always been a special friend of mine, and the Emily Dickinson one was the most successful. I was told after I left that they rebroadcast it several times.

Q (SQUIRE): You are such a perfect example of someone who could have had a successful career in the Foreign Service, you could have carried your career with you.

LEE: I don't know. Because in most of these countries they have rules about employing aliens.

Q (SQUIRE): Not now. We have that ...

LEE: I know it's reciprocal but how does it work? I understand it doesn't work too well.

Q (SQUIRE): But we have international schools, and now we teach people to teach English as a second language. But you already were doing this, way back.

LEE: Well, I think the situation is entirely different for wives now. From what I've heard, some complaints about wives in the Foreign Service as it is today, some of them don't enter into the life as much as they should. I hope this isn't true because I think you get a lot out of it if you — I did resent going to these fiendish coffees at Wahwee MacArthur's that you had to go. It was silly. And when she said, you remember, “Where is little Mrs. So-and-So?” And the DCM's wife said, “Well, she has a baby and the baby's ill,” and she said, (mimicking haughty voice) “I don't consider that an adequate excuse.” You know, the utter impertinence and rudeness of these people is [unbelievable].

Q (SQUIRE): And you knew you had to go, so you had to have sitters lined up so you could go no matter what.

LEE: So I'm glad that system has changed.

Q (SQUIRE): But you would have been an English teacher, I mean you are an English teacher and were one but you'd have been able to carry it around, I think.

LEE: Possibly so. I enjoyed the tutoring. And of course with children — I suppose you could carry, everybody carries on a career with children now. And we had help in the home. But I did enough so that I can't say my life in the Foreign Service was one of frustration. In spite of some of the horrible Officers we had, I enjoyed it, I made so many good friends, I enjoyed the countries where we lived.

Q (SQUIRE): You've just said something then. You suppose you could have carried on a career with children. We never thought about it.

LEE: We never thought of it, we were brought up that way.

Q (SQUIRE): It was something that might happen later.

LEE: But now, they have to do it. And they want to do it, I think many of them want to do it. I have a feeling that there are some who do not, and I hope that they won't have to if they don't want to. I found, suddenly with my first child, I don't know whether it happened to every American woman, but suddenly I had two university degrees and I was spending my tim(she laughs heartily) in conversation with a two-year-old. You know, you do require a little lift during these periods.

Q (SQUIRE): At least we had that — our husbands were in a profession where people were interesting, the conversation that went around us in the evening was interesting.

LEE: And you felt the work they were dong was worthwhile. And a lot of time the things you were doing were worthwhile, it wasn't just putting canap#s on a plate.

Q (SQUIRE): Well, Brussels was growing so, the American community was growing when we were there, also. So we were busy all the time.

LEE: And fortunately we weren't always exposed to the MacArthurs. I can remember when my mother came out, she was so horrified. She felt just the way I did when I first entered the Foreign Service. “This isn't American! I'm going to tell George.” “George” was George Aiken who was in the Senate. She told George but he couldn't do anything about it. (she laughs heartily) It is inexcusable that a Foreign Service chief should behave so badly to his underlings. There's no excuse for it.

Q (SQUIRE): And the wives may have been worse.

LEE: Oh I think some of them were absolute fiends. (she laughs)

Q (SQUIRE): Do you suppose they still are?

LEE: Well, I don't believe they can be.

Q (SQUIRE): They can't force people to do things.

LEE: I think that's been erased, don't you suppose? Now, I suppose there's still a great deal of tension about the promotion list, and women are insisting that they haven't been treated right, and the blacks, I suppose, are saying they're not represented enough; and there are all kinds of tensions and disputes. But the wives must be completely apart from this now, I can't see how it would impinge on them in any way. They can have their own careers and they can earn their own money and they don't have to show up at functions.

Q (SQUIRE): They can entertain if they want to.

LEE: Or not. So, in a way I would think this was progress, wouldn't you?

Q (SQUIRE): Oh yes. I think that they're missing some of the things that we had.

LEE: I do too. Particularly if they don't understand that there's a certain amount of pleasure to be gained from [the experience][End of side B, tape I; Begin side A, tape II]

Q (FENZI): Dorothy Stansbury, who was then head of OBC, got together 27 women to put out guidelines. Now, mind you, this was 1971, Dorothy Stansbury was a feminist-activist, the president of the Women's Action Organization. They made her the head of Wives Training, which she named Spouse Training because we began getting male spouses in. She convened these 27 women to do these guidelines which were out of the Middle Ages for the times. I knew Carol Pardon'[phonetic] article was in there because I had copied it, but I didn't realize yours was there. So you were here in Washington at the time?

LEE: I was here in Washington and Armistead had just retired from the Foreign Service. So I came out from under my shield and I was very polite about the guidelines. I said I approached guidelines for Foreign Service wives at posts abroad with “lively interest”. It

is a commendable attempt at improvement in an area which needs improvement. Unlike its many predecessors, pronouncements handed down from Sinai raising hackles all the way from Delhi to Dakar, this one takes a pleasant, intelligent and encouraging tone. It's conciliatory, it is reasonable, it is hortatory, and I am afraid it often will not work."

Q (FENZI): And it didn't.

LEE: It didn't, no. And then I proceed to tell why I think it won't work.

Q (FENZI): And it didn't. And I don't know any of those people. I do recognize a couple of names. I recognize George Lambrakis, and Gerald Lamberty, and Irving Cheslaw, those are the only names I recognize. Do you know any of those people?

LEE: I'd been away for a long time at that time.

Q (FENZI): But you see, in part of the talk I give at FSI I say that those guidelines just absolutely blew the roof as far as the young wives are concerned. And that's exactly what happened. And you having been through it for how many years?

LEE: For practically 25 years.

Q (FENZI): And just out of the Service, could see that they weren't going to work, too.

LEE: At the end of my article I suggest an ombudsman. I realized that the picture the Foreign Service has of itself would preclude a labor union. (she laughs) But I would suggest an ombudsman, somebody who would be outside to whom one could refer injustices and problems that come up.

Q (FENZI): In a way, FLO has done that. Not entirely but FLO has become the ombudsman for families and spouses.

LEE: But Pat was talking about the wife of the Ambassador in USSR, saying that she really frightens Foreign Service wives today.

Q (FENZI): She seems like a rather formidable person.

LEE: She is. But I should think that just because the thing has changed, it must be better than it was under Wahwee.

Q (SQUIRE): Wahwee could make you come and do the flowers.

LEE: She almost sent — who was the girl who worked in the Economic section with Armi in Brussels? Mary Carmichael ... I had, fortunately, arthritis when I was there with Wahwee and I used it to the hilt. And Mary came up to me one day savagely. “I know what you're doing. You're going to the parties you want to go to and staying home when you don't want to go.” And I said, “Mary, mind your own business.” (all laugh)

Q (FENZI): We won't name names but in what capacity does the woman in Moscow operate? She has no control, so what does she do? Maybe she should be told what she's doing.

LEE: I suppose she can say to her husband, “That family is murder and don't you promote Foreign Service X.”

Q (SQUIRE): Oh no, I don't think she'd do that.

LEE: I don't know.

Q (FENZI): But how is she frightening them?

LEE: I don't see how she could frighten them.

Q (SQUIRE): Well, I don't know whether she frightens them but she gets ...

LEE: She just ...

Q (FENZI): Well, it must be hard when you've paid your dues and be somewhat in your own mind living by the old rules and yet not being able to put them into ...

Q (SQUIRE): Oh, I think there were a lot of people who suddenly felt "wow, I've made it, my husband is now a senior Officer and I can't do anything, it's all been taken away from me."

Q (FENZI): Part of it could be, also, that women didn't relaize — could it have been that they didn't realize what their responsibilities were going to be as a senior Officer's wife?

LEE: I do think that sometimes the senior Officer's wife felt burdened and tense and probably became more savage than she otherwise — and I felt about Wahwee MacArthur, as I studied her, she had I think great native intelligence, and I think if she had gone into some career on her own ... And of course being married to him was hard times. He was a dreadful little man.

Q (FENZI): She may have been subject to pressures from him, which she was then passing on to others? She probably didn't like what she was doing.

LEE: She got to be an alcoholic.

Q (SQUIRE): Drank only champagne. She was interesting when the Interplanetary Union came to Brussels. Speaking really as the daughter of the Vice President, she lectured us and was very good at that, and said, "Don't you spend any money for them, they just will forget all about it." And I remember buying a dozen handkerchiefs for Senator Alcott from Colorado, at the very end thinking, "Oh well, I can afford a dozen handkerchiefs." He not only paid me back, he sent me a lovely little handkerchief that he'd bought in his hotel, along with his card. She was good.

LEE: I think she just wasn't using her abilities. When I saw her on the Lorenzo Mark crossing to Portugal, she was a siren. She wore black, and all I can remember is black cut low. I remember writing to Armi, “Retired spy she looks like.” But she was very personable, none of this law-and-orders business. I had nice conversations with Wahwee and she was okay. But somehow getting to be a senior Officer's wife was more than she could handle.

Q (FENZI): Both you and Caroline speak so fondly of Lisa Greene, and yet other people don't speak fondly of her.

LEE: She was hell on wheels in the Foreign Service but she helped nurse me when I was in the hospital and I almost fell over when Lisa walked in, an angel of mercy. Just absolutely charming and sweet. The Foreign Service wasn't good for Lisa.

Q (FENZI): Caroline is the one person that I've heard say something nice about Mrs. Loy Henderson. She just wasn't interested in what her husband was doing, she didn't like her role, and she probably was a woman before her time. She'd just leave and go up to Kashmir or somewhere, anyway she'd leave New Delhi, she didn't like it, it was hot. She may have been a woman way before her time.

Q (SQUIRE): So what good were we? Look what he did without ...

Q (FENZI): Well, I've always maintained that what we do has absolutely no bearing on our husband's career at all. (she laughs)

LEE: I think so too. I think you had to be a perfectly ghastly wife doing unmentionable things to have made the slightest ...

Q (FENZI): I don't think even that made any difference! (laughter)

Q (SQUIRE): We worked hard ...LEE: We worked hard, we entertained Inspectors. I remember when we were in New Zealand an Inspector broke his leg on the airplane.

Something happened and he was bounced, so he came to dinner in a cast. We were all very tender with him and took care of him.

Q (SQUIRE): Oh, those days of planning for every single minute.

LEE: And you had children, and in New Zealand you didn't have any help half the time. We didn't have central heating there, it gets so cold; it didn't snow but it sleeted. We had a fireplace and I was just feeding the fireplace all day.

But you know, to go back to the Ambassador's wife in New Zealand, this sort of exotic flower who came and began to adjust to New Zealand and enjoy it. After we left, one of the wives lost a baby, and this woman just came in day after day and held her hand, just darling to her. And you wouldn't have dreamed it was possible when she arrived.

Q (FENZI): I think a lot of these women are just out of their elements, they just don't know how to act. I really believe that.

Q (SQUIRE): Which is interesting when they've gone up through the Service. I mean, some of the real ogres by reputation are women who went right up from being a Vice Consuls' wife.

Q (FENZI): Well, "power corrupts."

Q (SQUIRE): "And absolute power corrupts absolutely." (all laugh)

LEE: It was wonderful to see somebody who was at the to of the heap who was pleasant and relaxed and charming and sweet and untense.

Q (SQUIRE): Oh, I can remember that awful time at the end of [our Brussels] tour when somebody came in the airport and Ambassador MacArthur had a speech which was written for him and he stood up and delivered it. Then some American General gave a speech, and it was two minutes longer than our Ambassador's. And he had a temper

tantrum. “By God, I'm of the deck here” — back at the ranch — “nobody, but nobody is to speak longer than I do.”

Q (FENZI): And so, she picked up on that.

LEE: She was Alben Barkley's daughter and he was so witty and charming and laid back. I gather that her sister was a very nice girl, and I asked somebody who knew those girls when they were little if Wahwee was [bossy] and they couldn't see that she was. I think shmust have been the small sister because in the family Wahwee was a baby name for her. I don't know her real name.

Q (SQUIRE): Maybe her sister called her that.

LEE: Well, are we through?Q (FENZI): Yes, we are, for now.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Armistead M. Lee

Spouse Entered Service: March 1942Left Service: September 30, 1967You Entered Service: SameLeft Service: Same

Status: Retired Spouse

Posts: 1942-43Toronto, Canada 1944-45Dakar, Senegal (but I could not join my husband until 1/45) 1946-48Melbourne, Australia 1948-51Wellington, New Zealand 1951-54Washington, DC 1954-56Kingston, Jamaica 1956-57Harvard (mid-career training) 1957-59Reykjavik, Iceland 1959-63Brussels (Embassy to Belgium) 1963-67Washington, DC Sept. 1967husband took early retirement from Service and accepted a job in private sector.

Spouse's Position: Started as vice consul and consular officer in Toronto; In Dakar did everything: consular, political and economic reporting plus six weeks as charg#; In Melbourne, consular and commercial with some economic reporting; In Wellington, political reporting; In Washington, desk officer for Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; In Jamaica, all jobs including charg#; In Brussels, First Secretary and head of Economic Section; In Washington, Deputy Director of Office of Central African Affairs.

Place and Date (optional) of birth: Bennington, Vermont; July 3, 1914

Maiden Name: Eleanore Ruggles Cobb

Parents (Name, Profession):

Irving Cassius Cobb - Businessman; when reared, Farmer

Mabel Ruggles Cobb - Writer, Member of Vermont legislature

Schools (Prep, University): Bennington High School; BA Middlebury College; MA Mills College

Date and Place of Marriage: Westford, Vermont; June 20, 1942

Profession: High school English teacher

Children:

Eleanore Ruggles Elson

Rebecca Rust Samand

Jeffrey Armistead Lee

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: In Toronto - packed books for troops; program of Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire; In Dakar - tutored French businessmen in English; In Wellington, conducted a lecture series on American poets for the Workers Educational Association and did two radio broadcasts on Poe and Emily Dickinson; In Reykjavik started and taught the American School for Embassy children; In Brussels was a member of the Board of the International School.

B. In Washington, DC: In early 1950s was a member of the Board of the K Street YWCA; Served later as a tutor for the Kingsbury Center; Still later, taught English at the Academy of the Washington School of Ballet.

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa

End of interview